



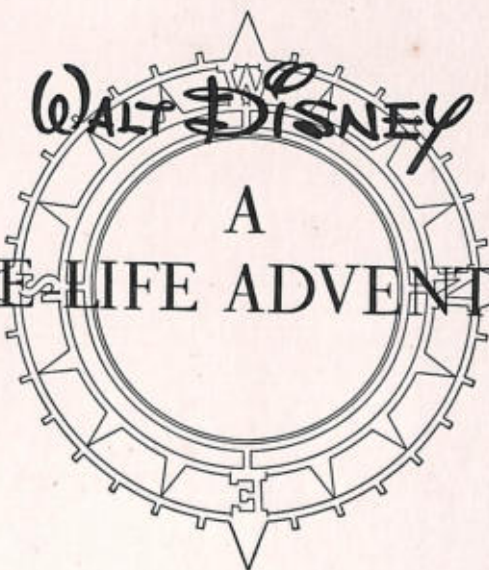
WALT DISNEY

VANISHING PR

TEXT BY

LOUIS BROMFIELD





WALT DISNEY
A
TRUE LIFE ADVENTURE

WALT DISNEY'S

VANISHING PRAIRIE

BY
LOUIS BROMFIELD



SIMON AND SCHUSTER • NEW YORK
IN COLLABORATION WITH MARC BARRAUD - GENEVA

A DOCUMENTARY ART BOOK

Prepared under the direction of

ARMAND A. BIGLE

Realization and lay-out of this volume
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The illustrations herein are reproductions from Walt Disney's True Life Adventure film entitled "The Vanishing Prairie."

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We acknowledge with thanks the contribution
of the above photographers.



In filming "The Vanishing Prairie" as a True-Life Adventure, we sought to make an informative and entertaining record of a kind of American wildlife fighting against extinction.

We saw it not alone as interesting in itself but in historic relation to the pioneer life and settlement of our Western frontier.

Many noted naturalist-cameramen helped us capture the color and character of the birds and animals for this authentic wildlife drama, in collaboration with our production staff.

The reception the film has had in many countries attests the universal interest in nature's living realities to which our series is dedicated. And of course it has been most gratifying to all of us.

Now we are doubly pleased by this beautifully made and illustrated book, and with Louis Bromfield's eloquent text. It carries to another permanent field of reference the true saga of a great assembly of wild creatures which, in these pages at least, will not soon perish from our common earth.

WALT DISNEY



Shortly after the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, purchased from Napoleon Bonaparte what was then known as The Louisiana Territory. Jefferson, acting for the young American government, signed the legal papers and arranged the payment through Congress of fifteen millions of dollars. At the time Jefferson was bitterly criticized for exceeding his authority as President in making the purchase, but today, and for more than a century, there has been no criticism of The Louisiana Purchase. It was probably the greatest bargain in the history of the world. Napoleon, in need of money and involved in absorbing intrigues with Spain, saw fit to confine the scope of his ambitions for the time being to the European continent with its ever-recurring complications and to abandon all idea of a vast American empire.

This is the Vanishing Prairie. Once, covered with waving grass, dotted with islands of trees, laced with silver rivers, it stretched, lonely and vast, from the Rockies to the Mississippi. But then came the pioneers, the farmers, the oilmen. Then came the cities. Though it is still immense, the wilderness has retreated as men have advanced.



The sale of this vast area of rich land for what, even in those times, was a paltry price, had immense reverberations in history, reverberations which are still in evidence. With this sale, France gave up her last claims to any land on the North American continent and both the United States and Canada

became Anglo-Saxon rather than French nations, with Anglo-Saxon laws and traditions and customs. Today one cannot avoid the temptation of speculating how different the history of the northern half of the Western Hemisphere—and indeed of the world—would have been if France had kept her claims upon the riches of Canada and Napoleon had chosen to keep rather than to sell that vast rich area known as The Louisiana Territory.

But the material effect upon history was even greater than the cultural and ethnological effect, for The Louisiana Purchase gave to a young nation, which at that time consisted of little more than thirteen small, weak and partly united states bordering the Atlantic Ocean, a vast and inconceivably rich territory, so vast indeed and so unknown and unexplored that its borders were not even defined. In an almost incredibly short space of time the new territory was explored and opened up to settlers, then to roads and wagon trails and finally to the steel tracks of great transcontinental railroads. Within little more than a century the vast wealth of minerals, oil, wheat, cattle and countless other precious resources were explored and developed and out of them, largely, came the vast wealth that has made the United States today the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

“Devil’s Gate” is the apt name of this forbidding spot. On the trek to the Pacific, hundreds of pioneers endured the hunger, the thirst, and the weariness of a long march across the plains, only to be slaughtered in the howling horror of an Indian ambush as their trains of heavy covered wagons lay helpless and exposed in narrow passes like this one.

Most of this immense territory was prairie (itself a French word), the most enormous Prairie in the world, extending from the Arctic Circle to the Gulf of Mexico. It was indeed a vast sea of grass, bordered by huge mountains on one side and the long bright ribbon of the Mississippi River on another. Around its edges grew great virgin forests and here and there within its borders there existed islands of trees and enormous marshes which were, at that time, very nearly impenetrable. Diagonally, like the ribbon of a decoration across the breast of a Queen, stretched the long winding course of the mighty Missouri River, and almost everywhere existed rivers and streams and sometimes lakes. Only a few scattered tribes of Indians, most of them nomads, inhabited the whole area and their life was easy; for this great Prairie fairly teemed with birds and wild game of every sort... ducks, geese, prairie chicken, grouse, deer, antelope and herds of buffalo numbered literally by the million. There were also huge numbers of smaller and of predatory animals.

With the development of the country, much of the Prairie land was plowed up to produce crops for the rapidly growing population of the new country and much of it was given over to herds of beef cattle almost as vast in numbers as the original primitive buffalo. Mining towns and cities grew up around the edges. Finally it was discovered that beneath a part of the Prairie lay an ocean of oil, so precious to the industrial world of the



Nature is a clever and patient artificer. It took centuries for the action of wind and water and flying sand to carve "Chimney Rock" into this unique landmark which thrusts itself high above the line of the horizon. Colorful even in the flat glare of day, it assumes a dramatic, almost eerie character when seen against the coppery glow of sunset.

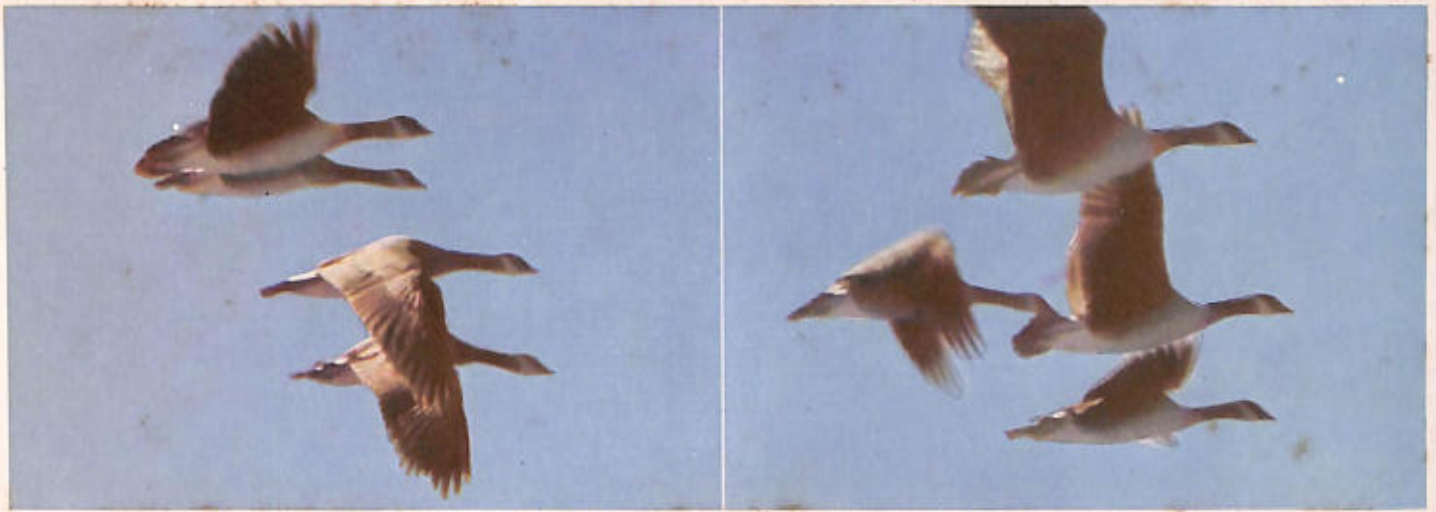
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries; and almost at once there grew up great cities like Tulsa and Omaha and Kansas City in the very midst of what, only a little time before, had been a wilderness of grass extending on and on almost to infinity toward the horizon.

And so the Great Prairie became vastly changed; the buffalo were very nearly exterminated, the antelope and the deer driven into the foothills of the high mountains together with the animals which preyed upon them. Only the smaller animals remained, stubbornly, not only in the face of agricultural and industrial advances, but in spite of planned and organized campaigns to exterminate them. They are still there in vast numbers... the prairie dogs, the birds, the coyotes, the small rodents and the snakes. In the thickly-grown marshes millions of wild ducks and geese and swans still rest and feed on their way north or south, in spring and autumn. Only the passenger pigeons, which once migrated in such numbers as to darken the sun, have disappeared completely. Fortunately good citizens and government agencies have arranged protected resting and breeding places for the birds and have set aside



in great areas given over to national parks a whole world larger than many European countries where the animal life of the great wilderness is protected and can live and breed in peace. Much of the Great Prairie and the neighboring mountains are wild and solitary country where a man may live and travel widely for days and even weeks without encountering another human.

Spring comes gradually to the Prairie. Above cottony clouds the sun shines more brightly in an intense blue sky. Then the winter-yellow grass seems to flatten beneath swifly skimming shadows, as the first migratory birds fly north. These birds, harbingers of the new season, come by the millions to nest and raise their young on the Prairie.



This is the great and fabulous area with which The Vanishing Prairie is concerned. This is the country which has been brought on the screen to people over all the world. In The Vanishing Prairie the immensity of the country is revealed in striking fashion, together with the intimate life of all the great variety of birds and animals which still inhabit its enormous spaces, many of them still as wild as when the first white men worked their painful way westward toward the Pacific Ocean.

Nearly all of the Great Prairie lies in the temperate zone, some of it so far north that in the winter the lakes and marshes are frozen over and the Prairie is buried in deep snow with temperatures which descend far below the Fahrenheit mark of zero. During the long cold hard winter the whole Prairie seems to become empty. Most of the birds leave for the South and many of the animals, grown fat on the lush feed of the summer months, go underground to sleep during the long bitter cold. Only a few predators remain visible, to prey upon the deer, the antelope, the buffalo calves, and the smaller beasts. In the North the whole Prairie becomes an expanse of dazzling whiteness and in the South the sea of grass turns brown. And always, day and night, the wind blows, mostly from the North, with nothing to check it from the Arctic Circle to the hot Gulf of Mexico.

But in spring the Prairie comes to life again, quickly, with a sudden brilliance seldom equaled anywhere outside the fantastic world of the arctic tundras. A wave of green,

The wild geese make it a point of honor to announce the change of seasons. They migrate in compact groups, soaring high overhead in perfect formation, and with a mysterious hierarchy. As they fly, they fill the air with their weird cries. The Prairie-dweller, hearing the strange music of the wild geese, knows that spring has returned.

beginning far down in Texas, pushes northward each day a little farther up the vast wide corridor running almost straight north and south. The patches of trees and the bordering forest take on soft pastel colors... beige and pale pink and lettuce green and pale yellow, and in the marshes the bulrushes appear again through the melting ice and the waterlilies and lotus send up to the surface the first pale green pads which will frame their blossoms later in the year. And as spring comes, the loneliness, the sense of emptiness, vanishes from the Prairie; small animals begin to come out of the earth and look about, checking the fresh new green growth and turning their radar noses into the breeze for the first signs of their enemies. The remaining herds of buffalo no longer paw and dig holes in the heavy snow to find the grass underneath. The elk appears again on the plains. All the earth comes suddenly to life in that festival gaiety which is represented by Easter and which is observed by peoples and religions everywhere in the world. It is the beginning of spring, the renewal of life, the breeding season, the time for building nests and raising the young. The spectacle of spring moving northward in grandeur upward across the vast Prairie is magnificent.

But because the Prairie is essentially a great drafty corridor, spring is capricious and sometimes when, late in the season, the blizzards coming from the Arctic sweep downward



Even a duck must pay for errors of judgment. These feathered voyagers, arriving too early, mistook a frozen pond for open water. Even rapid braking with their wings cannot prevent a frantic sliding as they land on all-too-solid ice, careen out of control, and finally collide, to explode outward again in a storm of indignant quackings.

toward the Gulf, there are sudden snows and freezing and the marshes and ponds, which have begun to thaw, freeze over once more in the last blast of the dying winter. And sometimes the birds discover, like the ducks in *The Vanishing Prairie*, that they have arrived too soon and that their landing space is not water at all but ice on which they skid, and slide and tumble until they find a little open water where once again they are at home.

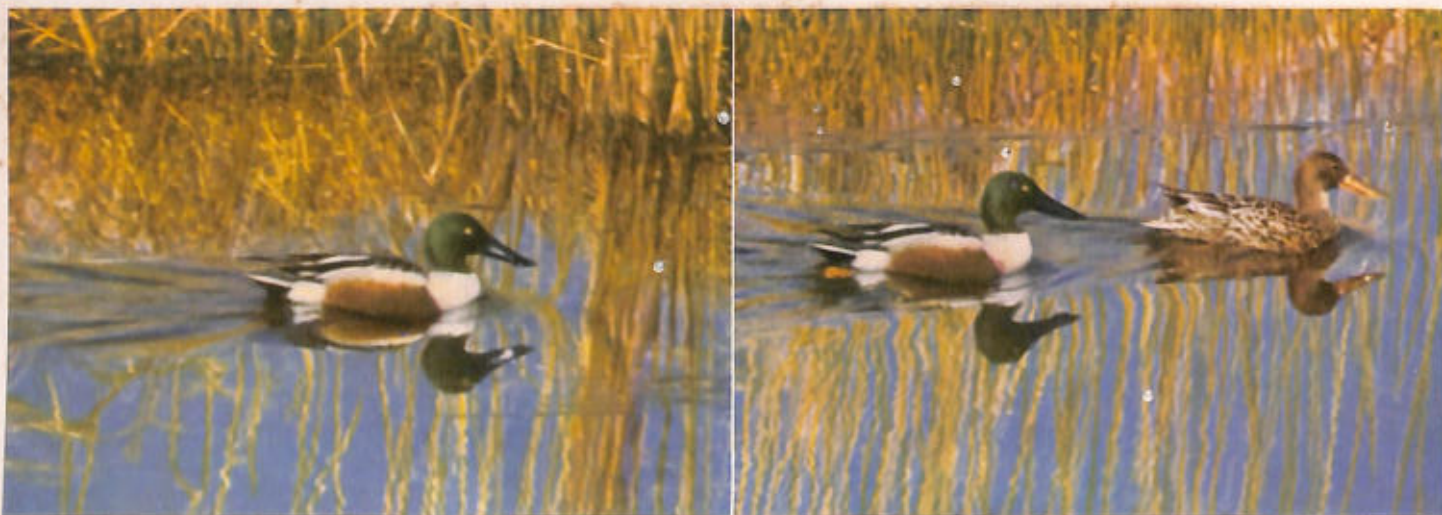
Do you know ducks? They are among the gayest and most charming of birds, comical, handsome, and amiable, and the wild ones brilliant in plumage. The females are like the cosiest and prettiest of *petite bourgeoise* housewives...very bustling and gossipy, good mothers and housekeepers. And their husbands...like gay dogs, rather common and lovable, all dressed in their Saturday night finery. On the earth they are clumsy, in the water graceful yet sturdy like the tugs which push the great ocean liners into the docks of New York or Liverpool or Havre. Only when they are hunted do they become distrustful and wily, for by nature they are friendly and in the great Prairie regions there are farmers and ranchers who maintain sanctuaries for them where they are safe and well fed. The wild duck quickly learns where he is among friends and he will come back again year after year to the same ponds and sanctuaries where he is protected and fed. The wild duck is a "cosy" bird.



Clumsy waddlers on land, ducks are graceful in the air and remarkably sturdy and efficient in water. This bird, alighting on a protected pond, puts down his webbed landing gear and brakes to a perfect stop. In his wake, the clear water boils for an instant to a diamond sparkle, then subsides into a shimmering gold and blue looking-glass.

But in the great flights against the enormous blue sky of the Prairie country he gains dignity and majesty merely by the immensity of his numbers, which on a sunny day sometimes cast a shadow between the sun and the sea of waving grass.

His cousin, the wild goose, comes in smaller numbers, but always in formation, like a flight of planes in attack. The great V formations of the wild geese start north for the tundras of Canada a little later than the ducks, for they are going a greater distance and the spring comes later to the vast marshes and tundras where they are bound to breed and nest and stay until the first breath of winter. The geese fly very high and nearly always they make a weird honking noise. Sometimes in hazy weather they fly so high that one does not see them at all but only hears the wild cry of the flock. It is a sound which to the Prairie boy and girl means that spring is here or, if the geese are going south, that soon the great winds and the blizzards will come. The sound of the wild geese cries is a part of the life of every Prairie dweller. The wild goose is one of the handsomest and most dignified of the greater birds, and clever too; he knows the best and safest nesting places, can outwit his enemies and even battle them to the death for his young if necessary. But there are other birds which come north with the spring and return with the first



Secure in their favorite marsh, Mr. Duck preens his natty russet and white suit, Mrs. Duck smooths her demure brown dress, and they set out in search of a suitable apartment. There is no time to be lost. Thousands of other prospective tenants are scouting the marsh for quiet accommodations where the landlord will not object to children.

chill warning of the winter winds, an endless number of songbirds to whom the great seas of wheat and grass are a kind of paradise, providing cover and grain and insects in abundance; and one of the largest of all the prairie birds, the strange and beautiful whooping crane which stands as tall as



man. You may have no chance at all of seeing one unless you make a special mission of it, for there are less than twenty of them left in the world. They lay but one egg or two in a nest and sometimes these are sterile. They have a strange and wonderful mating dance, slow and dignified, like a sarabande of the Middle Ages, which sometimes goes on for days until the dancers are quite worn out. It may be that too much dancing has brought about the decline in the number of these beautiful and fantastic birds.

And there is the grebe, representing quite a large family, who in appearance resembles an aging beauty, handsomely bedecked and overdressed, who still persists in coming to the ball. The grebe has a chill, brilliant, soulless and cynical eye, and a strange habit of laying eggs and hatching its young at the same time so that there is always a large family of children of different ages to harass and bedevil the worried mother. But, long ago and wisely, she has, like many a human mother under similar circumstances, enlisted the father to help in caring for them and bringing them up to an age when they can care for themselves. In The Vanishing Prairie you may see the grebe family fussing and worrying, and rounding up the stray children who run away from their younger brothers and sisters and the brothers

In a tall tree at the edge of the swamp, a dour youngster waits impatiently for dinner. Like all his family, this young blue heron has an astounding appetite. Fortunately, his parents are good providers. They can stand quietly in shallow water and capture any fish that comes within striking distance with rapier-like flashes of their bills.



and sisters who are not yet even born.

Everywhere in The Vanishing Prairie there is a sense of the urgency of perpetuating life. One sees it in the dances, the weird courtships, the brilliant feathering which appears on the birds at courting time. Spring-time, of course, brings these

activities into full expression with the birds. Nature, however, has arranged differently for the bigger animals like the buffalo, the deer and the antelope. Breeding time comes later in the year because the gestation period is much longer and it would never do to have young animals born during the season of ice and snow and freezing winds when they would have no chance for survival. So the bigger animals hold their courting season in the late summer and carry their young through the winter to be born when the spring has come, the Prairie, the marshland and the forest are unfrozen, and food and forage exist in abundance. To put the matter in a romantic sense, Nature exercises a miraculous foresight in protecting all her creatures, or, to put it purely upon a scientific basis, the birds and the beasts we now know on the earth today have survived because of their adaptability to changing conditions, while those species which have not developed these special habits, gradually die out and so become extinct.

Perhaps Nature's greatest miracle lies not in these specialized and small changes which do not occur by accident but according to a given plan. This, Darwin came to understand and set forth in his great book "The Origin of Species," where it becomes apparent

No matter what their species, babies are always hungry. These young birds grow so fast that they must be constantly stoked, like little furnaces, from the time they are hatched until they take wing. And, like all babies, they are impatient, bedeviling their harassed parents with shrill clamor. When they want food, they want food - immediately!

that an immense overall design or law appears to operate on a grand scale and frequently determines the future and the existence of whole groups and species of animals and birds. Henri Poincaré, one of the most remarkably gifted and educated men of our times, wrote some fifty years ago, "The true miracle of Nature lies in the fact that we are *not* witnessing a continuous succession of miracles." One might add that the overall and dominating grand plan seems to operate under rules which are exact almost to the point of being mathematical in their exactness.

The brilliant color frequently found in the male during the mating season has its obvious purpose, but color and shape also play their parts in disguising and protecting the animals and birds and even insects, which frequently resemble a stick, a twig or a stone so closely that they become impossible to distinguish from their surrounding physical environment. Even some of the weakest animals and birds have learned to assume an attitude of aggression and belligerence and "bluff." All this is in reality a part of their defense and represents the factor by which these specialized characteristics and traits make it possible for them not only to survive and maintain their species, but even to increase in number over the years and down through the centuries. In both great films "The Living Desert" and "The Vanishing Prairie" there is abundant evidence, in a countless number of cases, of the operation of this law of survival.



In their coats of fluffy, yellow down, these newly hatched wild ducklings look exactly like the ones we see in an ordinary barnyard. But very soon the down will be replaced by gorgeous plumage of green, white and russet; the young birds will wheel, turn and rise in the air, testing their strength before a thousand miles of flight to alien marshes.



Of all the Prairie birds, animals and reptiles the so-called buffalo is the greatest and the most imposing and more than any other deserves the name of Symbol of The Prairie. Although in the Prairie country and throughout the United States he is almost universally known by the name of "buffalo" and even a frontier hero (Buffalo Bill) was named for him, he is not a proper buffalo at all but belongs to the bison family together with the Indian bison or gaur and the shaggy aurochs of the Polish Marshes which once fought the gladiators in the Roman arena. But the American Bison, or buffalo, does not have the savage, fierce nature of the Indian gaur nor the stubborn combativeness of the extinct aurochs; he is essentially a big, clumsy, rather stupid and good-natured fellow who, before the prairies were invaded by the white man, lived peaceably, surrounded by his harems of admiring cows. His only real enemy was the Indian, who only occasionally killed him in order to eat.

He existed on the Prairie in almost unbelievable numbers and there are accounts in the records left by early explorers and Indian fighters of herds of buffalo passing for hours across a stream or a valley. Once the white man took over the country, the vast numbers began to diminish rapidly because the buffalo needed space and was unsuited to fences which shut in and disheartened an animal conditioned to the immense spaces of the Prairie on which in one year he would frequently travel hundreds and even thousands of miles. And the white man wanted the forage he ate for the raising of cattle to feed the rapidly growing



This is a buffalo cow. Once millions of these animals grazed on the Prairie. But the white man slaughtered them in such numbers that, by the turn of the century, hardly an American home was without its buffalo robe, and the noble bison was almost extinct. Today, a few survivors remain in sheltered areas set aside for their protection.



population of a new nation. In some areas there were even rewards for his destruction. And also he became the base of what was for a brief and tragic time in reality an industry; he was slain wholesale by hunters who shipped the hides eastward to the great and growing cities.

After a fashion the buffalo

was not only a symbol of the Prairie country; he became a symbol of one period of development in the gigantic and rapid growth of a whole nation. He symbolized romance and the adventurous life of the frontier. A famous circus, which traveled the whole world, was indirectly named for him; but for two generations there was scarcely a family in the whole of the United States which did not have a "buffalo robe." This was no more than the cured hide of the shaggy buffalo with which Nature had provided him against the blizzards and



The birth of a buffalo calf is an event of no little importance, for the future of the herd lies in the new generation. The mating season of the buffaloes is in the autumn, and the female carries her baby through the long, rigorous Prairie winter. Then, with the coming of spring, she finds a solitary clearing in the woods and gives birth to her calf.

icy winter winds of the Prairie. In the days before automobiles, with built-in heating systems and ventilation by warmed air, the white man followed the custom of the Indian and used the thick shaggy hide of the buffalo to protect him while riding in horse-drawn wagons and carriages and sleighs against the fierce



winds and blizzards of the countryside. For this purpose the buffalo hide was well designed, for the hide was thick and, when well tanned, flexible, and the outside was covered by a thick coating of what was more like wool than hair. Many people now past middle-age can well remember these buffalo robes and above all their smell, for the musky smell of the big animal remained in the hide for years and even generations after his bones had gone back to earth. Today these buffalo robes have been worn out or abandoned or the wool



The baby is, at first, an apparently lifeless bundle. After the mother frees him from the membrane which protected him during birth, she massages life into the little body with a strong but gentle tongue. In a few moments the protesting calf, still wet and shaking, is nudged to his unsteady feet and started on the stern business of living.



has long since worn off them, just as the buffalo himself has almost vanished; today they are curiosities to be found only in attics and museums, but they were a part of American life only a generation or two ago, and they helped to build the nation and cure its ills, for the buffalo robe was an indispensable part of the equipment of every frontier or small town doctor who might be called out at any hour of the day or night to hitch up his buggy and drive off to usher in a new life or ease the passing of an old one. But the buffalo robe—a completely unforeseen factor—very nearly exterminated the buffalo himself.

Among the animals of the Prairie the buffalo was and is like the big overgrown boy in a school—the boy who suffers from a glandular derangement or a too vigorous flowering of adolescence. He is big and clumsy and slow in his wits, and these very qualities made him a natural victim of his human enemies and for the Indians a rich and abundant source of food. Where other Prairie animals, like the deer, the antelope and even the elk, left the Prairie with the incursion of the white man and took to the rougher land and the foothills of the high mountains, the buffalo could not adjust himself to such a change of environment and simply remained behind to be slaughtered wholesale until a couple of generations ago, he came very near to total extinction. It was then that public-spirited citizens and government agencies took a hand and set aside large areas where the buffalo could live and roam under protection. Because the buffalo is no longer pursued and slaughtered, he has

The new-born buffalo calf is a helpless and bewildered little animal, hardly able to stand, incapable of finding his food supply without the patient help of the cow. He balances precariously on knobby legs and presses close to his mother, as if trying to escape from this alien and unfriendly world, and regain the warm security of her body.

become docile and tame and in many areas today it is possible to approach the herds almost as closely as one can approach a herd of registered cattle. Because of their fecundity, that fecundity which originally produced the vast herds, it has become necessary from time to time to kill off numbers of buffaloes lest they once again either starve—for the amount of food available to them nowadays has become limited—or take over the whole of the vast Prairie.

In *The Vanishing Prairie* one sees the whole cycle in the life of the buffalo from the rutting period when the big bulls fight savagely among themselves, through the long quiet period of gestation to the moment of the birth of calves which in the buffalo family becomes something close to a rite or a festival, when the whole herd remains in one place, gathered together until all the calves are born and able to follow their mothers on wobbly legs. The buffalo is essentially a nomad who is constantly, restlessly, on the move eating his way across the vast Prairie.

One of the notable scenes or sequences of *The Vanishing Prairie* is that dealing with the actual birth of a buffalo calf, the attention from his mother and her friends, the other buffalo cows, his efforts to get upon his feet and feed and finally his unbelievably rapid development into a sturdy little animal able to travel miles each day with the herd. Within this episode there are deep intimations of the more profound miracles of Nature, of the powers of living things to



Abundantly nourished by his mother, and encouraged by the other buffalo cows, the calf soon learns self-reliance. Before long, he is strong enough to join the herd in its endless wandering across the plains. Life has its ups and downs, of course, and nothing is easy, but the Prairie no longer seems a terrifying place. It is, instead, home.



adapt themselves to environment and indeed of the whole long process of the evolution of man and animals from the life of the steaming seas and marshes of a remote and unbelievably ancient world. At a comparatively advanced stage, some twenty thousand years ago, man was still seeking refuge in caves or on lakes. Huge glaciers linked together formed ice caps spreading over several continents. Man was then eking out a precarious existence, chiefly as a hunter or a gatherer of wild roots and fruits. Since then, the human race has



been able to harness nature's forces to an astonishing extent, for its own purposes. Modern industry and technique bear witness to such achievements. But, no matter how far he may succeed in his further endeavors, man must never forget that he will always be subject to nature's fundamental laws and that he cannot transgress them without terrible consequences indeed.

The buffalo, like most of Nature's children, is governed by unaltering tradition. As the herds travel from one lush pasturage to another, they always follow trails cleared for them long ago by countless generations of their ancestors. To the pioneers, these buffalo trails were highways of the Prairie, the shortest routes between water holes.

The mountain lion is a killer, yet he has something engaging about him, something not too far removed from the fiercely independent charm and soft, barely concealed savagery which is well known and understood by the lovers of all cats. He certainly belongs to the cat family and is the North American relative of leopards and panthers everywhere; yet he lacks somewhat the cold vicious fury so characteristic of the African leopard or the Indian panther. There is that kind of amiability about him that characterizes the true lion. Like all cats, he enjoys solitude and, fully conscious of his formidable strength, prefers to live on his own, relying upon himself for protection and for food.

Unlike his other ferocious cat relatives he rarely attacks man; rather, as man advances into the countryside, he retires higher and higher into the mountains or deeper and deeper into the forest until man presses him too closely, the supply of food becomes scarce, and he turns back to live off the sheep, the cattle, the pigs, the poultry which man has brought with him into the wilderness. Sometimes he lives very close to man indeed, especially when he finds that the theft of a calf or a pig is much easier than the long, tiresome and frequently futile process of stalking and killing the animals which live about him in the forest, the desert and in the foothills. Because of this, the mountain lion has become a persecuted animal, hunted frequently by men with packs of dogs to trail him down; and so he is threatened with



Like all outlaws, the mountain lion has many aliases : he is the puma, the panther, the leopard, the cougar. Once he was a silent stalker of the plains. But when he turned to sheep stealing and cattle killing, men drove him off. Now he lives, cautious as a desperado with a price on his head, hunting his quarry in remote places in the high plateaus.



converges upon that of the coyote, he sometimes finds an easy living off the young and the unwise of that member of the dog family. He has, indeed, been known, when hard pressed for food, to attack packs of the big grey timber wolf.



extinction despite the efforts of the wise people who would protect at least a few of his kind because of his beauty and biological interest and because he, too, plays a part in the checks and balances of Nature. Like his African and Indian cousins he regards dog meat as a delicacy and, where his territory con-

Nature has a way of arranging these checks and balances and with the invasion of the Prairies by the white man, it became evident within a generation or two that damage and even disaster could arise from man's interference with Nature's plans and balances. The threatened extermination of the mountain lions removed one of the checks upon the wolves and the

Young mountain lions are playful as kittens, given to all sorts of wholesome, invigorating outdoor sports like tree-climbing and squirrel-chasing. Unlike the tabby, however, the lion cub is in training for the day he can play for keeps. Then those yellow-steel claws will flash, and prey that now eludes him will no longer escape his assault.

coyotes which in turn preyed upon the prairie dogs and the other countless rodents from rabbits to desert rats, which could by mere force of fecundity and numbers alone, destroy great areas of crops and of grazing land. The efforts of ranchers to destroy and even exterminate the coyote only brought new troubles. Today there exists, stemming from scientists and practical ranchers who know the Prairie country well, an effort not to exterminate whole species of animals and bird life but to keep them in check and balance for the good of all concerned, and man perhaps most of all.

Today the mountain lion has become so reduced in numbers that he is scarcely any longer a menace, either to wild life or to the rancher's animals, but in *The Vanishing Prairie* there is a long episode which displays the habits of life and hunting which are typical of the mountain lion's existence. It is probably the most dramatic sequence of the whole film, for in it are all the elements in the pattern of the eternally exciting story or cinema. There is the villain (in this case a villainess, for it is a lioness with cubs hidden away in a cavern) and there is the innocent victim (a baby fawn), and there is the chase, the outcome of which we of course do not know until the very end; and of course again that end is a happy one.

But the episode is full of beauty as well, not only the beauty of the mountain landscape, the rocks and the trees; there is the innocent charming beauty of the baby deer, all



A full-grown mountain lion has little time and no inclination for the frivolity of the kitten. There are moments of relaxation, of course. This adult lioness, sunning herself on a fallen log, is a picture of feline contentment. But even as she rests she prepares for the hunt, flexing her great muscles and sharpening her claws on the dry wood.



flecked and spotted by Nature so that in the bushes and in the shifting light and shadow of the sunny mountainside, the baby becomes almost invisible. And there is the rather terrible beauty which lies in the movement of every cat, a movement which is never broken but flows constantly in a kind of rhythm, now rapid, now slow, like the flow of oil or water. In the chase this movement develops a terrifying intensity and efficiency in which every sense of the cat, even perhaps to the hunter's uncanny intuition, comes into play. It must be terrible indeed to be pursued by an unseen cat, a sensation that only too many men, familiar with the methods of certain totalitarian political intriguers, have known full well.

The drama of the chase of the fawn by the lioness becomes intensified because actually there is no chase in terms of rapid motion. The chase is one in which the cruel, fiercely concentrated purpose of the lioness who must find food for her young is pitted against the innocence but also the deep-rooted primeval instincts and inherited experience of the tiny fawn, who has been for only a few short days in a cruel and ruthless world.

The fawn lies hidden deep in grass and bushes, its tiny nose pressed closely against the earth and somehow, by some extra sense, it knows that close at hand, perhaps so near that the pungent odor of the lioness invades its own sensitive nostrils, there is terrible danger... a danger so great and so pressing that the little fawn seems not even to breathe lest it betray its presence to the symbol of death that circles its hiding place.

The spotted markings on the pelt of the lion cub are the insignia of his babyhood. As long as their marks remain, these cubs will stay with their mother. The lioness will feed them, and, like any good mother, will see that they learn to look after themselves. By the time their spots disappear she will have taught them to hunt their own food.

And the lioness? Even in the role of killer there is a magnificence about her. See how she moves, with what beauty her great body seems to flow over the rocks and among the trees and bushes! See how she stops, raising her head to sniff the air. She knows well that somewhere, very near at hand there is food for her young cubs, food which she is driven to kill for them by an instinct as old as time and as profound as the ocean itself, an instinct against which she is quite powerless; for Nature herself has taken a hand, and this beautiful animal *must* do what she is doing. There is no choice in the matter, any more than there is a choice as to whether she will or will not accept the quick, passionate, almost vicious coupling with her mate. In a way we can understand her; for any of us who are strong, have known the compulsions which impose upon her as upon us the terrible necessities to eat, to breed, to live. And there is her beauty, and beauty, even in death and destruction, can be disarming and seductive, and sometimes seem even to soften murder and destruction.

And so we watch this game of life and death, this pattern of killing to survive, until at last the lioness, baffled and bewildered—perhaps aware that she has been too long away from her cubs and that they themselves may now be threatened by danger—gives up the hunt and returns hastily across the rocks of the mountainside to the cave where her own young lie hidden. All this is drama in the best sense, complete with pathos, beauty, cruelty and suspense.



When the meat from her last kill has been devoured, the lioness must kill again to feed herself and her family. She sets out on her murderous mission in the fierce blaze of noonday, stalking as noiselessly as a great, tawny ghost across a dry stream bed, her green eyes glittering wickedly and her tail nervously twitching as she thinks of her quarry.

By now readers must be aware that both Mr. Disney and myself have a strong feeling of kinship for all the higher animals and indeed a close association and sympathy for all that is life. Albert Schweitzer, one of the greatest of living men and a philosopher of great depth and understanding, has written: "To affirm life is to deepen, to make more inward, and to exalt the will-to-live. At the same time the man who has become a thinking being, feels a compulsion to give to every will-to-live the same reverence for life that he gives to his own. He accepts as being good, to preserve life, to promote life, to raise to its highest value life which is capable of development; and as being evil to destroy life, to injure life, to repress life which is capable of development... A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help."

The Vanishing Prairie like The Living Desert is filled with this sense of "reverence for life." The believer in such a philosophy cannot draw a sharp and dividing line between



the higher animals and himself; he is aware that there is much in the animal, wild or domestic, which is close indeed to man, far closer than the city dweller or the crude materialist ever fully understands. Out of such knowledge and such faith grow the capacity and even the instinct to see animals as remote cousins and as creatures bearing a resemblance to man in many of their

This doe has strayed, unsuspecting, into the domain of the lioness. Though she does not know the nature of the lurking menace, instinct tells her that she is threatened. She hesitates and falters, then stops. Her heart beats loudly. She is a child walking alone through a darkened room, its dangers more deadly because they are unseen.

traits and actions. So came into being a character called Mickey Mouse who has been accepted around all the world everywhere by people of every color, race, creed and degree of literacy as a companion, friend and brother endowed with the qualities and weaknesses which are universal to the human race.



As Julian Huxley, one of the leading biologists of our time, has said: "...Less than a century ago... Darwin, following on Lamarck and the other great naturalists, comparative anatomists and physiologists who preceded him, finally dethroned man from his claim to a unique position as Lord of Creation. At the same time he introduced us to the idea of universal law in biology, by demonstrating that all plants and animals, including man himself, share many basic similarities, and that the origin of the human species is due to the same general type of agency which is involved in producing a local variety of snail or a new breed of poultry: evolution operates as automatically as gravity... Evolution is today... essential as a background to our general thought. Human history is itself a part of evolution and acquires new significance by being related to the long-term trends of the evolutionary process. For, as a result of studying evolution, we now know not merely that man has evolved from lower animals, but that he is now the sole trustee of life for further evolutionary progress in the future. We also receive some very real comfort from the realization that man is, biologically speaking, a very young type, and that his recorded history, since the time when he first achieved civilization, is negligibly short compared both with the time needed to achieve major

Then the doe catches the scent of the lioness. Her fear becomes panic ; her muscles freeze. The murderess is there, crouched in the thicket, hidden, watching, getting ready to spring. Would it be better to stay in the open, to be able to see? Would it be better to run to the concealment of the forest? The stricken animal hesitates, and is lost!



evolutionary results in animal evolution in the past, and with the ages still to come, in which our species may learn to control its own destiny and happiness.”

Indeed, let us not forget that from the biologist's point of view, man is a newcomer in his own limited world and was the last mammal to evolve. The

history of the human race occupies a small slice indeed in the history of life on earth. According to the latest estimates, which are now based on reliable data, yielded by the unflinching and immutable time gauge of radio-activity, life must have been in existence on earth for over a thousand million years, man himself, however, less than one million years, so-called “modern man” a hundred thousand and civilized man, certainly not more than twenty thousand years. Barring an unforeseen happening such as a collision between our cluster of stars,



Lion cubs have tremendous appetites, and supplies do not last long. The huntress must return to the hunt. Searching for fresh game, the lioness can cover the ground in enormous leaps, or she can creep as gently as a shadow. A new scent reaches her, and she is instantly alert. There is something alive nearby. But what is it? Where is it?

of which our sun and ourselves are but modest members, and another cluster of celestial bodies—and such a catastrophe is so highly improbable that it can be ignored for human purposes—modern science allows us, today, at least another two thousand million years before changes are likely to take place in our sun



to such an extent that conditions on earth will make life, as we know it, impossible. Accordingly, man's history to this day, with its record of misery, cruelty and hatred, but also of immortal deeds and aspirations towards a different life, when understanding, selflessness and charity will play an ever increasing part in the behavior of peoples as well as in that of individuals, can be regarded as the merest, clumsy fumbblings in the development of the human race. Perhaps, more encouraging still, it is only during the past hundred years or so that the



It is a fawn. Too helpless to run, the baby deer must rely on camouflage for protection. Motionless in the brush, his spotted and flecked coat blending into his surroundings, he waits breathlessly while the puzzled cat circles and prowls around him. The lioness finally abandons the search for this elusive prey, and hungrily slinks off again.

beginning of our better understanding of some of the basic facts, in the world around us, has taken shape as modern science. And already, that knowledge which is just a start, enables us to envisage our truest task, that of introducing mankind to new spiritual experiences and achievements, so as to balance the tremendous and, perhaps, too sudden accumulation of factual and so-called technical knowledge which, certainly nowadays, threatens to unbalance and overwhelm humanity and even to destroy it.

To quote Professor Huxley again "...modern biology is indispensable as providing the necessary evolutionary basis for our thought. However, it is of value in a quite different way as well—in reminding us of the range and variety of life, and thus preventing us from falling into a dangerous self-centered intellectual parochialism.

"We are surrounded by myriads of existences which are different from our own. That is the primary biological fact which the products of urban civilisation are so apt to forget. Bee and spider, swallow and owl, hare and weasel—they exist alongside of men and women, with their own distinctive life to lead. Once we grasp this, we realize that their existence, in itself, contains something of intrinsic value. But, if it has intrinsic value, it also has value for us, in enlarging our experience, our understanding, and our sympathy."



Although Nature plays no favorites, this time she has allowed innocence to triumph over brute strength. But is innocence the word? In deceiving the lioness, the fawn has behaved as wisely as the most experienced of cunning old foxes. Safe once more, the little one rises from his concealment and runs awkwardly to look for his mother.



For me it is virtually impossible not to see animals as people, from the old walrus resembling many an elderly gentleman I have known, with all the wisdom and shrewdness of experience, to the dog who is "almost human." And so, inevitably, I see the animals in *The Vanishing Prairie* as people. Among them the prairie dog is for me the Cockney, right off the streets of London. In contradiction to what is implied by its name, the prairie dog is not a relative of the dog himself, for he is a rodent, like rats, mice and rabbits. He lives in a maze of underground burrows which he scoops out himself, and his body is shaped for its passage through earth, just as the body of water animals is streamlined for an easy passage through the water. He has powerful forepaws, with strong nails; the ears do not stick out from the head. A grass-eating animal, but rather weak, he could not, during the winter, when the Prairie lies under a deep cover of snow, find sufficient subsistence by scratching the snow as does the powerful buffalo. Nature, in her foresight, has therefore endowed the prairie dog, like a few other mammals in similar circumstances, with the habit shared by the reptiles, of lying dormant during the cold season. That winter sleep, or "hibernation" as it is called, is much deeper than ordinary sleep, for the animal's body almost stops working altogether. Its heart scarcely beats and it almost ceases to breathe. There is no outside fuel available to keep the body machinery working, so the machine slows down and draws what little energy it needs from the tissues stored in the body during the spring and summer.

There is a spectator to this short battle of wits. The anxious mother doe watches from a distance. She knows that her baby is in mortal danger. Has the fawn learned his lesson well enough? Can he protect himself from the enemy? After the relieved mother sees the lioness stalk off, she welcomes the fawn back to her side with tender kisses.



Like the Cockney, the prairie dog is gregarious, humorous, pugnacious, witty and comic. He loves the pavements of his own prairie dog town. He likes gossiping with his neighbors. He is an excellent pantomimist and even indulges in satire. There is a perkiness, a jerkiness, about him that belongs not so much to the philosopher, enjoying the solitude which gives him time for reflection, as to the pragmatist who has derived his wisdom, his fighting tactics, his gaiety from experience among his fellows. In a way, the little prairie dog lives, like the courageous Cockney of the war years, in perpetual danger from the raiding coyote and dive-bombing hawk. Even in the midst of the most terrible danger he does not lose either his courage or his wits. If he lacks the dignity of the mountain sheep, the grace of the mountain lion or the beauty of the deer and the antelope, he makes up for it all by his comic charm and his unsuspected courage and endurance. Like many a Cockney, he is constantly engaged in breeding large, noisy and rather untidy families.

Like many a Cockney he makes his home in the basement below the level of the street, and it is a warm cosy home, full of small rooms and connecting passages, not the last word in modern decoration, but made up of bits and pieces, some of them actually inherited like the enlarged and hand-tinted photographs of Grandmum as the Pearly Queen. He is the permanent resident of a permanent city; in him there is none of the nomad blood of the buffalo or



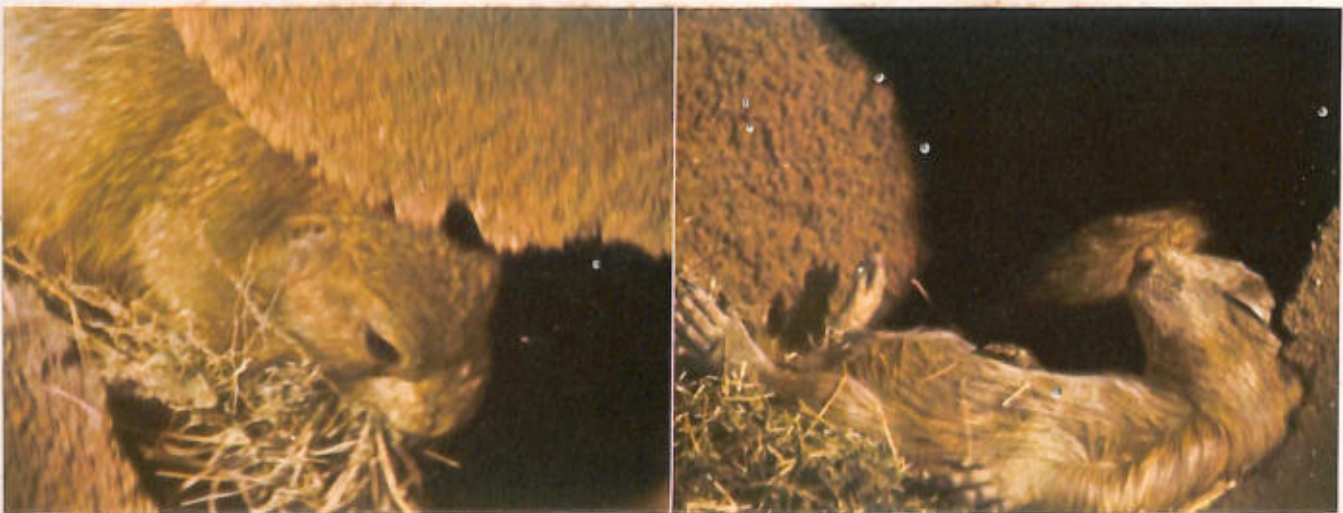
The most prolific inhabitants of the Prairie are the prairie dogs, so called because of the barking noise they make. These charming, comic little fellows lead a gay life in prairie dog towns. Though they have large families to care for, they are never too busy to stop and gossip with the neighbors, or hold lighthearted gambols in the open air.



the wild duck. He may even be living in the semi-detached villa erected by his great-grandfather. His friendliness is without limits; he will be friendly with anyone who displays the slightest inclination for friendliness and shares his home at times with rabbits and small owls and other rodents. Yet he can hold

his own and is not to be imposed upon; he can outwit the deadly ferret and wear down and even kill the heartless, treacherous, murderous rattlesnake.

It is only fair that the dramatic play of the lioness and the fawn should be followed in *The Vanishing Prairie* by the comic episodes of lively prairie dog existence. We see the whole round of life during a day with the prairie dog. We even go underground and see how he lives and brings up his boisterous family. We travel through the maze of tunnels



The prairie dogs build veritable underground cities over the entire Prairie. The inhabitants of these towns work diligently to take care of the passageways and to enlarge the houses. They dig with their hind legs, and flatten the long tunnels with their muzzles. Individual homes are not elegant, but they are cozy, convenient and safe.

which connect the various rooms of his dwelling and frequently with the dwellings of his neighbors, a maze which is one of the greatest protections for himself and his family for, while a snake or a weasel pursues him along the endless and intricate corridors, he may take a sharp turn and double back, leaving



his pursuers far behind, or he may even emerge into the open air and, running at top speed down the street, duck into the equally intricate home of a neighbor.

He has neighbors everywhere on every side. The prairie dog town is familiar to every boy or girl living in the great Prairie country and it is the little Cockney's habit of building enormous and incredibly populated towns that has brought upon his head the wrath of many a rancher, for he and his friends can dig up acres of range land and devour acres of wheat and good grazing. Traps, which he is adept at avoiding, and poison have been used against him and in some areas he has been almost exterminated and his towns have fallen into ruins like those of the ancient civilizations of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Sometimes, as in the eastern Middle West, the only trace of his life and civilization is an irregular mound of earth, muddy in rainy weather and mere dust during the long hot summers.

Many a good cow pony has had to be destroyed and many a stalwart cowhand has suffered a broken arm or shoulder because the horse, traveling at full speed, has stepped into an unsuspected prairie dog hole or been badly thrown by the ruins of a prairie dog town. But despite his enemies and the determined effort of the rancher to destroy him, the

Prairie dogs have four great enemies: the coyote, which attacks them on the ground; weasels and snakes, which pursue them into their homes; and the hawk, which dives upon them from the air. These young prairie dogs, venturing into the open for the first time, do not know about their adversaries. But before long the lesson will be learned.



brave little fellow has survived, and indeed, in great numbers, principally because of his fecundity. He is always raising families and very large ones at that.

Perhaps the worst of our Cockney friend's enemies is the coyote, which in some parts of the Prairie country and along its borders, where underbrush

and forest provide cover, still exists in great numbers. He is rarely seen in the daytime save by the animals on which he preys, but at night one can hear his mournful howl, not unlike the howl of his cousins the jackals in India and Africa. Like them he is sly and shrewd rather than courageous and on the whole he leads a hard life finding food for himself and his family. The female is likely to be the bolder and more savage since it is mostly upon her that the responsibility rests for feeding not only herself but her young.

To capture or kill the clever little prairie dog, the coyote is forced to employ all his ingenuity, for there are in every prairie dog town sentinels always on duty to alert the whole community when it is threatened by the attack of an enemy. In *The Vanishing Prairie* you can see these sentinels on duty and see them giving the alarm with a flick of the tail and a sort of squealing whistle which, freely translated, means simply "Duck for cover, Mate!" And the rest of the community ducks. Where a second before there has been above ground a whole bustling, gossiping community, there is suddenly not a prairie dog in sight. It is a tactic which makes the shooting of a prairie dog almost impossible, especially since their towns are built on the open plain with little or no cover to make stalking easy.

A shrewd and tireless hunter, the coyote is the prairie dog's worst enemy. The harassed female coyote, with a large family to feed, leads a frantic, catch-as-catch-can existence. Every small wanderer of the Great Prairie is possible prey for the hungry coyote, but the prairie dog, young, fat, and tender, makes the most succulent meal of all.

And so the coyote in search of a tasty prairie dog meal has his own troubles and he has evolved the only tactic of attack which can have even a moderate degree of success. Somehow, crawling flat on his belly, the coyote must get between the prairie dog and the hole down which he is able to duck with such incredible speed. The coyote must catch the prairie dog off base while, suddenly forgetful of ever-present dangers, he is straying too far from the center of his town in search perhaps of some tasty morsel of fresh new Prairie grass.

But even when the coyote succeeds in coming between the prairie dog and his subterranean refuge the battle is not won. You would think that a beast like the coyote, so much larger than our little friend, driven by hunger and armed with vastly superior strength and long fangs, could make quick work of the little Cockney. In *The Vanishing Prairie* you will see that merely outmaneuvering our small friend has not meant his ruin and his end. He has still plenty of tricks and resources left and he knows well how to use them. He can move rapidly and dodge, almost with the facility of his distant cousin, the Indian Mongoose. He can jump sidewise or straight upward into the air. He can turn and double back; and always somehow, during the battle he manages to keep his face toward the enemy. This is important because, like all the rodent family, he has a fine set of sharp and gleaming



These coyotes are still too young to have to worry about stern realities, such as where they will get their next meal. Some day they will have to meet life on its own terms. But now they are pampered children, tumbling about the family home, making pseudo-serious attacks on some interesting-looking ants, or simply dozing in the warm sun.



teeth which can cut and slash; and if the worst comes to the worst, he has a set of claws, kept sharp by constant excavation, which can tear out eyes or rip up large pieces of hide. And back of all this he has an immense courage, out of all proportion to his size, and he knows well the power of a bluff-

ing attack with loud noise, even though the only noise he can make is a sort of angry squeak.

The battle between the coyote and the prairie dog is one of the most entertaining sequences in the whole of *The Vanishing Prairie*. It enlists all the sympathies which are enlisted



when as children we hear for the first time the *Story of David and Goliath*. Here is a little fellow in a battle with an enemy many times his size, but a demon of courage, who will use his wits to outbalance the superior size and strength which confronts him. Each time he outwits the coyote, each time he seems near his end and escapes, you murmur aloud at his courage

This coyote has been clever enough to get between an over-adventurous prairie dog and the doorway to his home. With his retreat cut off, it appears useless for the prairie dog even to try to escape. The little rodent is agile and courageous, however. The coyote may have caught him off guard at first, but now he is alert and ready to fight.

and chuckle at his cleverness.

But his basic tactic is his best. In all the sallies, in all the maneuvers, in all the skirmishes, he draws the fierce coyote a little nearer to the border of prairie dog town until out of the corner of his eye, our friend calculates the distance and sees that with a lucky, speedy



sally he can duck down a hole, flicking his tail with a final squeak into the very face of the baffled coyote. And that is what he does, leaving the coyote (who knows from long experience that attempting to dig her hoped-for victim out of his underground labyrinth is useless) to return hungry to her den. It is a sequence which, in natural reality, has all the charm of Disney's own "Three Little Pigs," which like "Mickey Mouse" has traveled round the whole of the world and been understood and loved by children standing in the rain of an open theatre of Java, in the luxury theatres of New York, or on the sidewalks of Bombay or Rio.



So begins a strange duel, with the duelists not too unfairly matched. The coyote is the larger and stronger of the two. But the prairie dog is quick and nimble, and his teeth and claws, sharpened by constant excavation work, make very effective weapons. The coyote knows this well, and dodges to avoid the flashing, snapping charge of his tiny foe.

But the coyote is not the only enemy of our small Cockney friend. There is another, more difficult for him to guard against, for the attack is made swiftly, like a bolt of lightning out of the blue sky high above him. He is the favorite victim of the falcon hawks which haunt the Prairie country, preying upon all the smaller animal and bird life. The prairie dog has eyes placed on the sides of his head, which is a good thing so far as the enemies which stalk him from the ground are concerned. Sitting upright, a prairie dog sentinel has a wide range of horizontal vision. By turning his head a little, the whole of the nearby landscape is visible to his bright eyes. Only when he has found a patch of new fresh grass and turns greedy and forgets his own safety does a land-stalking enemy like the coyote have an opportunity for coming between him and the safety of his city. But, the prairie dog does not see straight upward and sometimes he forgets that death may come not only from the grass that surrounds his town but out of the air itself.

In *The Vanishing Prairie* we see such a dive-bombing attack with all the brilliant beauty of the falcon hawk's swift drop to catch our plump, small, chattering friend in his sharp claws and beak. The danger is great and immediate so that, watching, one holds one's breath and for a fraction of a second it seems that the little Cockney is lost, like one of



As he fights, the prairie dog gradually works toward the entrance to one of the houses in his town. Suddenly he sees his opening. It is risky, but he must chance it! He streaks past the coyote and in an instant is safe underground. The hungry coyote makes a vain attempt to dig him out, then cries aloud in rage and disappointment.

those other brave Cockneys who in a city on the other side of the earth stayed out of the bomb shelter too long or deliberately exposed himself to death, sometimes needlessly, in order to warn and protect his fellow-citizens. The claws of the falcon actually graze the little fellow's furry coat but he slips safely into his burrow. And then a half-comic conviction comes to the watcher... that the prairie dog has deliberately played a trick on the bruised and frustrated falcon; he has waited until the very last second, knowing well how little time he needs for plopping into the hole where the falcon cannot follow him. He has himself deliberately created this comedy-drama to make a fool of the handsome falcon with the profile which is the very symbol of savagery.



It would not be the first time that a clown has made a fool of a murderer.

In a little while the prairie dog pokes his nose impudently out of his burrow to see whether the sky is clear and this time he finds not another enemy bent on destroying him, but some comic and rather humorless young acquaintances from down the street whom he can torment, setting their tempers on edge while knowing that they cannot do him much harm.

These friends are feathered and still partly covered with down, for they are young burrowing owls who have moved into an abandoned burrow at the very heart of prairie dog town as their ancestors over innumerable generations have done. They are out at a time when no self-respecting owl should be about, when the sun is overhead and the light is bright. In Greek mythology, the owl is the symbol of wisdom, the associate of Athena, and

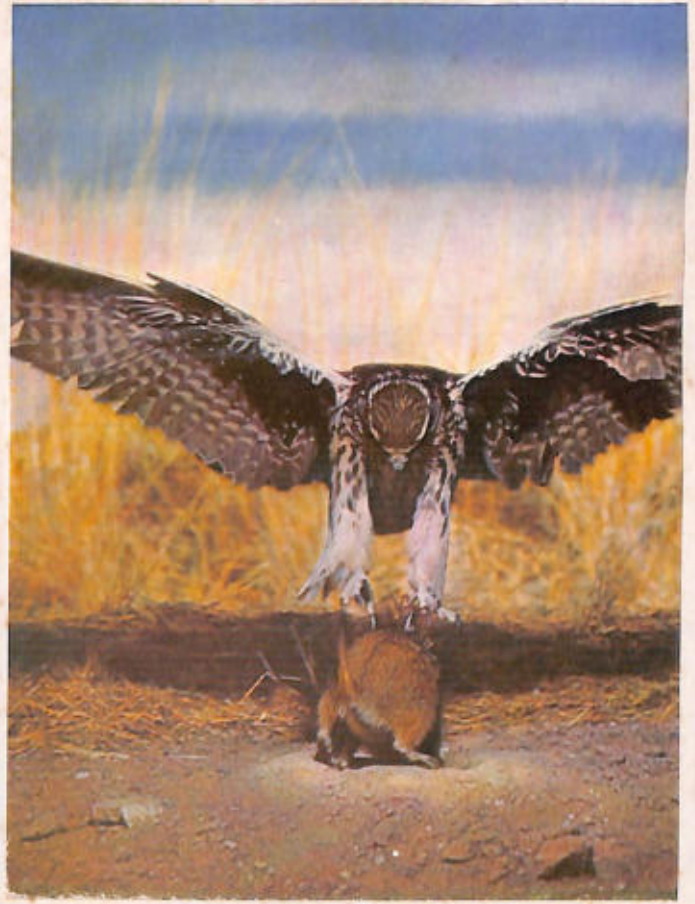
Death can come from more than one direction; it can wear more than one disguise. The keen-eyed falcon hawk is a terrifying destroyer. Because the prairie dog does not often look to the sky, he is usually aware of the presence of his airborne enemy only an instant before he feels the beating wings and the steel grasp of the sharp talons in his flesh.

among the common phrases among peoples everywhere, who have owls among them, are such expressions as "a wise old owl." "A night owl" in almost every language designates a person who, like the owl, haunts the night clubs and is gay and dissipated. Alas, I am afraid the owl is a fraud, and, like many people, has gained a reputation for being wise simply because in a way he is a bore, makes very little conversation, and creates an impression of wisdom simply through his habit of sitting and staring. How many such owls have we all known in universities, in business offices, among the critics! Certainly there is nothing gay about him. He is the grimmest of all birds; nor has he the great beauty of his fellow killers, the hawk and the eagle, undisputed kings of the sky during daylight.



The prairie dog sentinels have spotted the falcon hawk, but their chattering warning comes too late. This little fellow, caught in the open, scurries for safety. On the first dive, the hawk numbs his quarry with a blow from his powerful wings, but cannot grasp the furry body. Instantly the prairie dog is up again, running for his life.

In many mythologies the owl also has sinister implications; he perches on the shoulder of the witch while she stirs the cauldron filled with her evil brew; he is always present on Walpurgis Nacht, flying low with soft whirring wings over the orgies of witches and goats and demons. The devil and his friends, the incubi and succubi, frequently appear in the form of an owl. These implications of the sinister, I can credit far more to the owl than I can credit the quality of wisdom. In the wooded country east of the Great Prairie there is a small forest owl which, on the darkest nights, gives forth a cry which chills the blood, like the cry of a woman being tortured to death. And twice, once in the haunted country of North Wales and once in the depths of the Brazilian jungle, I have returned late at night to



The handsome bird returns to the attack, swift as lightning, and the cruel claws reach again for the frantically racing prairie dog. Too late! Again the hawk misses. With a final desperate effort the prairie dog has gained the entrance to his sheltering burrow. He darts underground, just escaping the talons which graze the fur on his back.



find a great owl perched on the foot of my bed, who would not go away until driven out of the door. But long after he had disappeared, on fleet, silent wings, there remained with me a sense of doom, of being haunted, of having seen a dread omen.

I think the sinister qualities and associations attributed to the owl arise from the fact that, unlike the hawk who makes his kills in the brilliant sunlight when his eyes can see for miles, the owl is a night murderer who sees clearly in places where man and other animals are blinded by the velvety darkness. He works, stalks and murders in caverns, in dark alleys of the thick woods. Nothing is more terrifying than to be walking in the woods at night and have a great horned owl of the North American forests sweep in almost dead silence over one's head, the feathers of his four-foot wings brushing one's head and face. He can see you but you cannot see him. Unseen, he is watching you and investigating you as possible prey; he goes away only when he has decided that you are too formidable an adversary. Yet if you come upon him in the daytime, half-blinded even by the dim light of the forests he haunts, he is a comic figure like a very old man with gout, disagreeable and mean-tempered, hissing and staring at you from the limb of an overhanging tree. Owls are indeed shy and avoid human habitation; there are, however, a number of well substantiated reports of hunters or wood folk who have been deliberately attacked and sometimes severely wounded by some great horned owl which had probably been disturbed by the man or infuriated by what

The hawk glares after the fleeing prairie dog. His look says, as clearly as words, "I'll get you next time." But for the present the prairie dog is safe, well out of reach in his cozy underground nest. The hawk wastes little energy regretting his lost opportunity. He will not have prairie dog for dinner, so he scans the plain for other prey.

the bird felt to be a threatening presence in the neighborhood of its young. In such instances it would appear that the great horned owl attacks fiercely and relentlessly, usually making for its enemy's head, the eyes in particular.

There are some two hundred species of owls distributed all over the world, from the tropics to the Arctic, where an owl with white plumage is eking out a precarious existence. All owls are true birds of prey, hunting out—during the night only—the small animals upon which they feed: mice, rats, small snakes, lizards and the like. But, if they can take them by surprise they will also kill larger animals—especially their young—such as partridges, pheasants, rabbits and, of course, prairie dogs. The owl is admirably equipped for night hunting: strikingly large and piercing eyes which can look over the bird's own back, a keen sense of hearing and a soft plumage enabling the owl to make a practically noiseless flight. Powerful talons and a strong hooked bill complete the picture of a relentless and bloodthirsty flying terror from which no small animal is safe during the dark hours.

But these half-feathered little burrowing owls which our friend the prairie dog encounters when he has scanned the sky and discovered that his dive-bombing enemy has disappeared, are neither sinister nor dignified. They are small, rotund, only partly feathered, with the fat round bodies of a plump little boy and the heads of toothless witches and the grim and soulless



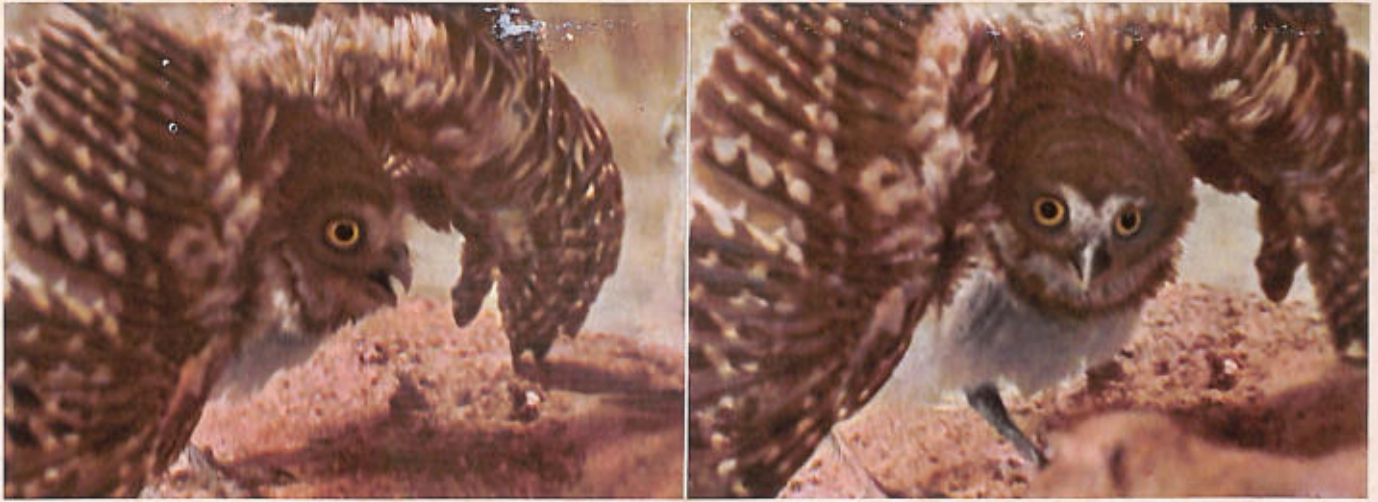
Though he has had a bad fright, the prairie dog refuses to huddle underground on such a beautiful day. He puts his head outside the door. The coast is clear; the feathered monster is gone. In its place is quite a different bird, a burrowing owl. For centuries, the ungainly burrowing owls and the jovial prairie dogs have been good neighbors.



eyes of an avaricious accountant. They are merely grotesque and the fierce hissing sounds they make have nothing really menacing about them. They are merely threats and the prairie dog treats them with a kindly and friendly contempt. He is used to them, as are all his ancestors who for thousands of years have lived with them, sometimes under trying conditions, even letting out a furnished room to them in his flat below the street level. It is true that when the young burrowing owls are a bit older they may well put beak and claw into what now are harmless threats, but even then the owls and the prairie dogs manage to live together in the same community upon reasonably amiable terms. Now while the owls are still young our small friend jostles them, trips them up and in general gives the



Burrowing owls live underground, generally in homes abandoned by prairie dogs. Unlike their lively neighbors, however, they have no sense of humor. This prairie dog, ever the practical joker, wants a little excitement. These birds are much too solemn! What could be more fun than to ruffle a few of their feathers and upset them a bit?



humorless and solemn birds a thorough “working over” in one of the most charming and comic sequences of a film so abundant in delightful scenes.

Perhaps the worst threats to the safety and the life of our merry, cocky little friend are not the hawks or the coyotes which cannot follow him into the maze of tunnels and chambers, in which he lives and raises his family; they are the ferret and the rattlesnake which can follow him deep underground wherever he goes. The rattler relishes prairie dog meat and pursues our little friend relentlessly, following its quarry's scent easily, by means of its tongue, which the snake ceaselessly darts forward. However, the ferret is infinitely the more dangerous and vicious. He is carnivorous, with the body of a snake and quickness of



Luckily for the prairie dog, these owls are too young to do more than hiss their protests at his cavalier treatment. If they were fully grown, he might be soundly pecked for his impudence. Eventually, he tires of owl-baiting and turns his back on the rather bedraggled bird. Perhaps something down the street promises greater amusement.



movement which is like lightning itself. From him there is no real safety among the tunnels and passages and the prairie dog must use his wits, confuse the ferret and lead him astray into the blind alleys and the tortuous windings of prairie dog town.

It is one of the marvels of The Vanishing Prairie that actu-

ally we are able to watch this underground pursuit in all its fierce intensity and desperation, the plump prairie dog twisting and turning with the hot breath of the blood-drinking ferret close behind him. Again and again the ferret wastes time by losing the trail and going astray; for in the closed chambers and tunnels, reeking with the scent of scores of prairie dogs, the sharp nose of the ferret is not of much use. And from the moment the first sentinel of prairie dog town has given his whistling alarm, every man, woman and child in the neighborhood is on the alert. It is like a community in which an insane murderer is at large and the citizens have been warned to be on the lookout for any wild-eyed stranger. During the chase, the prairie dog comes up now and then for air and then pops down another distant hole, leaving behind the ferret confused by all the cross-paths and scent-mingled trails, to begin all over again the tracking of his prey. It is a game which in the end can wear out even the blood-thirsty ferret who, frequently enough, gives up the whole thing and goes off hungry. And we are, once more, left wondering at the ways of nature.

With all the elements taken into consideration one would say that the chubby prairie dog had no chance of escaping from the ferret, for the ferret seems so much faster and

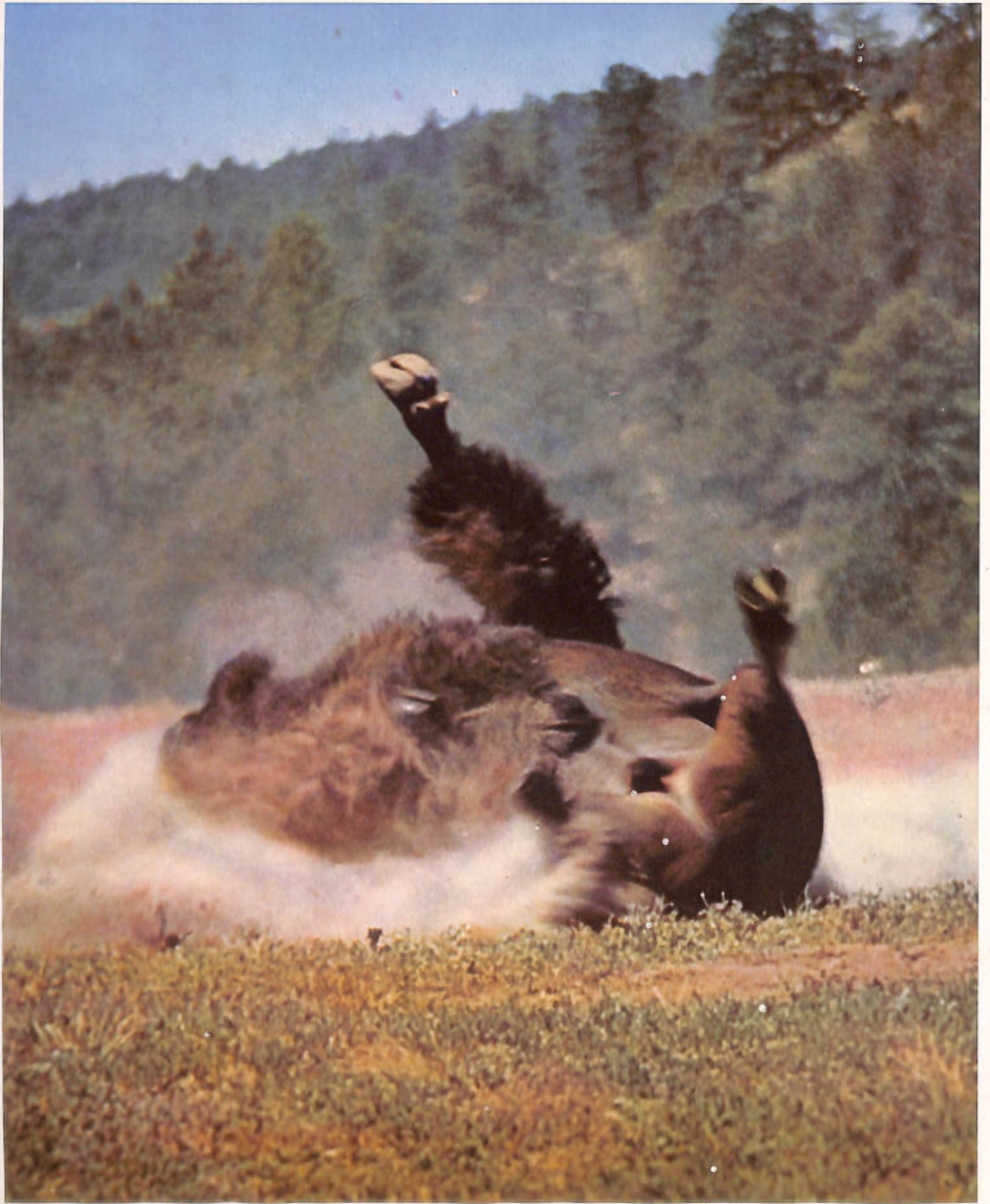
The prairie dog can sometimes outmaneuver the coyote. He can sometimes outrace the hawk. He can hide underground from both these enemies. But when the weasel hunts, there is no place to hide. The black-masked bandit, dreaming of blood and slaughter, can follow the fleeing prairie dog right into his intricate subterranean passageways.

sleeker; and there is, of course, a very good reason for this. For, though both animals are mammals, their food differs completely. The ferret is an out-and-out flesh eater and the prairie dog feeds exclusively on plants. That difference in diet necessarily affects not only the inside of their bodies, but also their main outside shape. The plant-eaters, from rabbits and prairie dogs to elephants, have rather barrel-shaped bodies; the flesh-eaters, from ferrets to coyotes and lions, have lean limber figures. This is because their food is highly nourishing and easily digested. They do not have to eat much of it, nor do they need a long food duct to deal with it. In plant food, on the other hand, the nourishing part has to be taken out of a great deal of stringy, indigestible matter. So plant-eaters have to eat much more food than flesh-eaters and, accordingly, they must have a much longer intestine. This, inevitably, makes the plant-eater's body much more bulky and bulging, instead of being slim, and in some cases almost serpentine, as is the body of a flesh-eating animal.

But, even when hunted by the ferret, the little Cockney shows no signs of losing his head; one even has the feeling that he is actually enjoying the chase in which he himself is the pursued. As in the case of the hawk and the coyote, it is all a part of the day's work, and if the prairie dog can get some fun out of it, he seems to believe so much the better.



A clever prairie dog can often baffle even the murderous weasel. The layout of his burrow is tricky, and he is well acquainted with it. And just as the game of hide and seek seems about over, the prairie dog may pop out of one network of burrows and run to another distant hole. Then the weasel must either start the chase all over, or give it up.



When at last the episode of the prairie dog's life comes to an end, we leave one of the smallest of the Prairie animals to return to the greatest, the great, burly, clumsy buffalo. The greatest difference between the two lies not so much in size as in wits and spirit and the capacity to adapt to a changed environment, an ability which lies behind the survival and the development of all the higher animals. Where the great buffalo could not live under changed conditions of the vast Prairie and became threatened with extermination, the prairie dog and some other small Prairie animals and birds have continued to flourish.

This time we come upon the buffalo in the breeding season which precedes the birth of the buffalo calf which we have seen earlier in all its details. The season comes after the middle of the summer so that the calves will arrive at the beginning of spring and in the mild weather, for nature has arranged all of these things very well indeed. The buffalo, driven by the overwhelming need to breed and perpetuate his kind, acquires a new power and dignity which he does not have during the rest of the year, when frequently he seems to be no more than another cow in the herd, timorous and ready to flee rather than to fight.

Like all males bent upon conquest, he begins in the breeding season to show off, to give a kind of performance to impress the buffalo cows and convince them that he is a great fellow indeed, a great lover and a fit father for their children. In a way, he becomes a great braggart



During the long summer, the whole Prairie seems to drowse beneath the sultry sun. The buffalo herds, foraging where the grass is thick and sweet, and the water holes close together, are tormented by clouds of swarming flies. This buffalo temporarily dislodges the stinging insects by rolling in the dust, kicking his heels in a brief ecstasy of relief.



and takes to bellowing and roaring, something he rarely does during the rest of the year. Like all bulls he believes that there is something impressive in the act of pawing the earth and butting with his head against an earthen bank or one of the few trees which appear in the river bottoms of the Prairie country. He

rolls on the earth raising clouds of dust, and snorts and even engages in battle with any other bull buffalo which happens to be about. The battles are short and far less fierce than they appear to be, for the buffalo is not armed with the rapier horns of the fighting bulls of the Guadalquivir or even the massive horns of the bull Cape buffalo or the more sluggish water buffalo of Asia, which can create an uproar in a quiet village at rutting time and threaten the whole countryside. The bellowing, the threats, the attacks of the American Bison usually



After the middle of summer, the buffalo bulls grow touchy and irritable. The breeding season is beginning. Spurred by the irresistible urge to perpetuate his kind, the bull works himself into a fighting frenzy. He bellows and paws the ground. But during all his epic posturings of rage, his face is curiously passive, expressionless and serene.

create little damage and, although there have been cases where one buffalo has killed another, the fight gives the impression more of bumping and jostling than of a truly murderous attack.

As with the elephant, the actual breeding depends more upon the bull coming into rut than the females into season, and perhaps for this reason the buffalo turns wild and puts on an especially noisy show to impress the cows and bowl them over with demonstrations of his masculine powers and ferocity. But the buffalo bull, despite his great size and the loud noises he makes, must seem a clumsy lover and brute and braggart to anything but a buffalo cow. Yet under the drive to breed he does attain a certain majesty which is not apparent during the rest of the year. He carries himself with dignity and a new light comes into his eyes. His habitual docility vanishes as in man himself it sometimes vanishes in the humble fellow who, walking out with his girl, becomes a romantic and a braggart. His aim once achieved, his desire assuaged, the buffalo turns again into a humble and unaggressive fellow.

With the antics of the mating season, we have come in *The Vanishing Prairie* through the whole cycle in the life of the buffalo—the very symbol of the land which he once roamed in countless millions—and from him we go into a spectacle of the true grandeur of life and of tragedy on the Great Prairie.

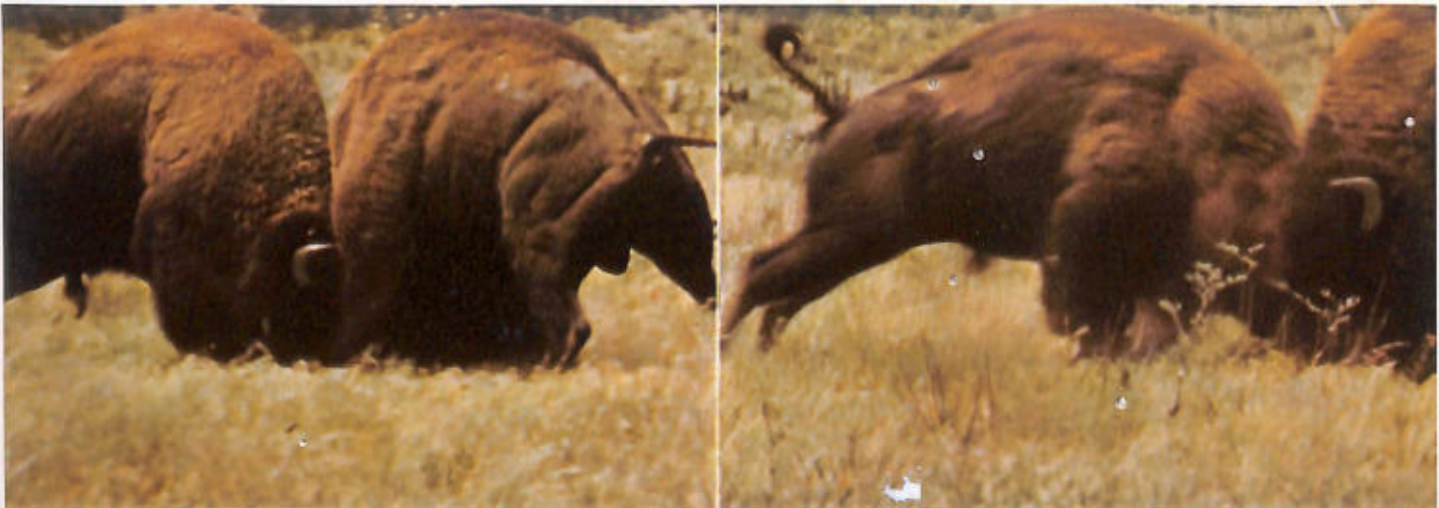
A harsh climate and strongly contrasted weather are major factors to be reckoned with by all inhabitants of the Great Prairie. That enormous land



All male animals fight for possession of the female. The battle of the bull buffaloes is one of the most impressive, and one of the shortest in nature. It begins with the loudly trumpeted challenge to the field of battle. Two bulls take positions on the plain, massive heads lowered, muscles taut, poised and ready for the brutal, rushing charge.



channel stretching from the Arctic tundras of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, lies in the heart of a great Continent, too far away from the Atlantic to benefit from the moderating influence of its moisture laden and temperate winds; it is also cut off from the Pacific by the tremendous ranges of the Rockies. In such a country, open to the polar winds as well as to the fiery blast from the tropics, the climate is harsh and uneven. The winter is bitter on the Prairie, with tremendous blizzards piling up deep snow drifts against every obstacle upon the boundless plain and the mercury sometimes freezing in the thermometer; it comes with a rush in the fall, and retreats only slowly in the spring with sudden counter-attacks and blasts of snow and frost, sometimes well into the month of May.



Countless generations of buffalo have re-enacted this brutal drama on the Prairie. In spite of the savage ferocity of the lumbering charge, and the tremendous strength of the entaged bulls, neither will be seriously injured in the fighting. The buffalo cannot kill or maim with the short curved horns which set so far back on his shaggy head.

Conversely, during most of the long summer the whole of the Prairie country is hot, frequently much hotter than many a tropical country, with a dry burning heat against which there is only the dubious relief of the fierce Prairie winds which blow for days at a time. But now and then there occurs a sudden and awesome change when the grandeur of the weather invests the whole of the Prairie country with a new and menacing character. The people of the Prairie country, and even the animals, know the signs of this awesome change. The air seems to grow cooler and the sky to change color from the brilliant blue of midsummer to a heavy, leaden grey. Clouds...clouds immense even in the vast sky of the Prairie country...begin to pile up in the north and the west; expectancy, however, does not last long and within a very few hours only the storm has come roaring down the vast corridor that runs all the way from the Arctic zone to the Tropics.

In the Prairie country the rain comes not in the gentle downpours of the British Isles or of the Norman Country in France; it does not come in the quick brilliance and beauty of the sudden thunder-storm of the rich Middle West nor the sudden quick floods of rain in tropical areas. The rain comes in torrents and the temperature at times can drop forty or fifty degrees Fahrenheit within three or four hours. The downpour has the violence and the volume of tropical rain but it is not over so quickly; floods of water fall from the sky for hours and



Suddenly, for no apparent reason, the fights stop. The bulls are restless, sniffing the dry air and scanning the sky, but they no longer bellow and thunder at one another. The atmosphere is electric, tense, intolerable. The cows gather their young and, slowly at first, the herd begins to move. Soon the ground shakes under the drumming hoofs.



sometimes, with the quick drop in temperature, the rain turns to hail with murderous effect upon the crops and even sometimes on the young animals of the Prairie country. And as the rain falls, the dry stream beds turn into devastating torrents and the waterholes and even the marshes are flooded. So violent is the downpour that even on the low hills there seem to be inches of water running away in flooding, raging, streams.

The Prairie country, either winter or summer, is not a smiling and gentle country. Its beauty is a vast and violent and terrible beauty, and in one of the great northern storms, violence and death descend upon the smaller animals and upon all the newly born ones. The nests of water birds in the marshes are flooded and turbid water flows into the maze of underground rooms and passages of prairie dog town and into the burrows of rabbits, isolating the animals on the higher ground to which they have fled, until the cold, drenching, rains have ceased, the waters subside and the sun again appears. In such circumstances, there is something elemental and awe-inspiring like the great flood of the Old Testament.

This kind of storm is known as a "Norther" among the Prairie country people, who usually look upon it with dread, even when there is need of rain during the hot dry summer. Sometimes the rain comes in reasonable amounts, nourishing the Prairie grasses and feeding the vast parched acreages of wheat, but when the sky becomes lead-colored and the wind begins to grow chill, farmers, cattlemen and animals all take measures to protect themselves.

As the herd races before the storm, clouds build a solid, purple-black wall across the sky and lightning dances on the horizon. Suddenly the parched, summer-seared Prairie springs into a new and terrible life. The dry grass has ignited! Fanned by the hot wind, the flames crawl, then gallop, leaping and twisting in an orgy of destruction.

And nowadays there are too the dreaded dust storms which since the thirties, have brought the expression "dust bowl" into our language. This grim change has come with the overgrazing of the land by cattle and the plowing up of land for wheat which should never have been plowed. The same soil which is swept away by floods of rain during a "Norther" is blown away when the winds change to the Southwest and persistently suck the moisture out of the earth itself. Coppery clouds of dust many thousands of feet high swirl over the land, blotting out the very light of the sun. Sometimes there are days when at noon, one cannot see to the other side of a cattle paddock, when the lights of automobiles must be turned on, when whole farms and pastures literally blow away and bulldozers must be used to keep open the roads where the dry dusty earth piles up in great drifts like the blizzard snows of winter. Sometimes the dusty earth of the Prairie country blows all the way across the United States and into the Atlantic Ocean. And the storms bring not only disaster to the farmers and the cattleman but death and starvation for animals, both wild and domestic, as well. In *The Vanishing Prairie* one has a magnificent portrayal of one of the great flowing rainstorms in which many an animal, and even birds, must struggle to survive. Something of the terrible violence is carried over into the cinema theatre itself.



Just as it seems the Prairie will be consumed, a pounding rain drowns the flames. But when the downpour continues for hours the sun-baked soil cannot absorb it. Floods drive all the great and small inhabitants of the Prairie to higher ground. These ducklings enjoy the situation, but the young coyotes resent being marooned by rising water.



It is perhaps fitting that *The Vanishing Prairie* should, before the final chapter when autumn turns at last into winter, show us the life of one of the most dignified and handsome of animals, an animal which could truly be said to have a nobility of appearance, a nobility that lies in his carriage, in the tilt of his head, in his stubborn and everlasting defiance toward man and toward his enemies, the savage mountain lion, the merciless wolf and even the cunning coyote which once managed at rare times to prey upon his young.

The mountain sheep was himself never an inhabitant of the real Prairie country. The great waving sea of grass he could see far down below the mountain heights where he felt at home and safe from all enemies, but he never joined the company of buffaloes and prairie dogs. Sometimes in search of forage he wandered down into the foothills but it is doubtful that he ever traversed the vast flat plain where the antelope ranged and the coyote found an easy life. He was, like the mountain lion, an individualist with a fierce sense of independence. Even among the wild animals of *The Vanishing Prairie* one can discern the differences which separate the dweller of the Flat Country from those who live among mountains and valleys, forests and rushing streams. People who live in flat country rarely have the pride, the intense individualism, even the dignity of the hill and mountain country people. Flat country rarely produces what is known as "characters." Flat country people are likely to be



At one edge of the Great Prairie are the highlands. The handsome mountain sheep lives here, where the grass grows only sparsely, where snow never completely melts from one year to the next. Like all those who choose to dwell above the crowds, the mountain sheep is solitary, fiercely individualistic, arrogant, dignified, and not a little shy.

conformists and to differ very little from their fellow citizens. I have heard an old farmer say: "If you live in flat country there is nowhere to go because wherever you go it is exactly like where you came from. It's no use having a spirit of adventure in flat country. But if you live among hills and mountains and valleys every place is different. There is solitude and over each hilltop there lies a whole new world." People from hill or mountain country are never happy in flat land and can rarely adjust themselves to it.

I think that probably the mountain sheep and the mountain lion feel much as the old farmer felt; in flat country they would inevitably become restless and uneasy. How can one imagine the mountain lioness we have seen earlier, living in great herds like the buffalo, or the mountain sheep, with his pride and love of standing at the very peak of the highest mountain, adjusting himself to the intensely communal life of prairie dog town. One has only to see the superb view of the mountains and the mountain sheep high against the blue sky to understand that he belongs to another world from that of the true dweller of the Prairie.

Like the mountain lion, the mountain sheep is one of the most graceful of all animals; but there is a difference in the kind of grace. The mountain lioness whom we saw stalking the deer has the sinuous, flowing grace of a Hindu temple dancer; that of the mountain sheep



This ram, silhouetted against the perpetual mountain snow, walks with the dignity and grace of a monarch. His ancestors may have ventured occasionally onto the more abundant pastures of the foothills. But they could not abide the presence of man, or even that of other plains animals, so they retreated forever to the lofty, remote peaks.

is the grace of a superb dancer in the ballet, a grace which always is stylized and seems to have a movement that is always upward, up and up always toward new heights. And like the ballet dancer, he seems able to defy the laws of gravity and to perform arabesques and leaps which cannot be done. Watch the sureness of his feet as he scampers with the greatest of ease along an almost perpendicular slope of naked rock, finding a foothold for his small sure feet where quite obviously there is no foothold. There is indeed something breathless about him. When he leaps from one crag to another, the heart sings and for a moment one has that miraculous sensation, sometimes born of dreams, that one is flying.

Remotely the mountain sheep is the cousin of the domestic sheep which most of us know well, but I am certain that the mountain sheep has for this modest and unattractive cousin a kind of concealed but well-bred contempt; for the domestic sheep is one of the stupidest of animals with no real will to live. Only in the young lamb playing "King of the Castle" with his fellow lambs is there a fleeting resemblance to his magnificent cousin, a resemblance which fades away quickly within a few months or even weeks as the lamb grows older, to leave only a dull animal, without individuality, the perfect conformist, the perfect Marxian. Much nearer to the mountain sheep, are his cousins the ibex and the Himalayan sheep



Brilliant and crisp, autumn is the mating season of the mountain sheep. The rams assume a martial air and, like golden-armored knights errant, go questing for adventure and for love. In the distance, this noble champion has just seen a rival grazing near a pretty damsel. He leaps forward, ready to do battle for the hand of the maiden.



which, like him, live by choice only on the rockiest and highest mountains, silhouetted in pride against the vastness of the sky. True, he has another distant relative which resembles him in agility and acrobatic feats...the common goat who, with the domestic pig, is very likely the most intelligent of all farm animals; but the goat is a vulgar fellow, in whom shrewdness and calculation take the place of nobility, and comedy or even low farce the place of dignity. Essentially the domestic goat can be said to be a brilliant and sometimes malicious clown, cynical with a complete scorn not only for his fellow creatures, but for man himself. He can, like the experienced sow, live off the land.

The mountain sheep has perhaps a contempt for man and his fellow creatures, but it is difficult to judge for he rarely comes near to man or even to his fellow animals, a fact which makes him difficult to hunt down and shoot. He haunts only the highest peaks where there exists little other life but his own, and his coloring blends so closely into the tan and grey of rock and lichen that, frequently enough, the untrained eye cannot see him even when he is close at hand. Yet there are men who try to hunt him down, and their predatory activities have driven him constantly higher and higher into the wildest of mountain country, until today in most areas he is protected by law because he is one of the most beautiful of God's creatures and because more than any other animal on the vast American continent he is a symbol of the solitude, the beauty and the wildness of the high mountain country.

Warned by hoofs pounding on the hardened ground, the rival starts, draws back, gathers himself and springs to meet the intruder. The battle of the mountain sheep is not like the clumsy, brutal charge of the buffalo bull. Rather, it is a tournament without spectators, a tilting match in which two beautiful animals meet in splendid conflict.



The scenes in *The Vanishing Prairie* in which the mountain sheep and his family play their roles are perhaps the finest, the most beautiful and the most intimate pictures ever taken of their tribe. Much of the beauty lies in the very body of the sheep himself, in the proportions and precision and balance of its outline and the suppleness of its muscles. In the courting season when the rams fight, they provide not the clumsy antics of the big buffalo nor the comic park bench *amours* of the prairie dog nor even the fierce, concentrated breathless coupling of the mountain lion when life itself seems to be suspended in the creation of new life, but a spectacle of beauty and splendor in which the elements of love and death, never very remote from each other, seem to come together. Watch the rams as they fight against the sky, as they rush toward each other filled with a fierce intent to maim or kill or shatter the spirit. Here indeed is a combat between two lovers, both beautiful, both young, both vigorous. In the very bodies of the rams and in their simple, intent purpose there is a quality of beauty which the ancient Greeks with their instinct for simple perfection, have understood better than any other people and which has never since their time reappeared in all art.

And now in *The Vanishing Prairie* we come to the end of the cycle of changing seasons, of mating, of birth, of death, among the animals and the birds in all their variety of that vast open plain and the mountains and forests and mighty rivers which border it. The change comes first in the high mountains when one night the winds grow suddenly cold

The shock of the charge is Herculean, but no blood is spilled. The fight does not extend to the annihilation of the vanquished. Indeed, there seems to be no vanquished, no victor. Unexpectedly, the tourney is over and the combatants withdraw unhurt. The damsel, meanwhile, remains supremely indifferent to the struggles of her suitors.



and the snow begins to drift down among the peaks and the crags and the mountain sheep, knowing deep in his very bones the meaning of the first snow and howling winds, begins to slip down from high peaks as the snow moves in, down from the glaciers to the wind-torn trees that mark the end of the timber line. Here there is shelter and here among these shattered trees he will find food and some refuge during the long winter. And at the same time the elk comes down from the high mountains and out of the lower plains into the shelter of the pine forest. In the boundless sky, high above the waving sea of grass touched by the first frosts, the Prairie people hear again the wild cry of the flying geese, and the marshes are filled with migrating birds and with veritable clouds of wild ducks, fat from



The game is played a hundred times in the same disinterested, sportsmanlike spirit. However, when a rival intrudes at the very moment the lady is won, the fray can become brutal. The rams clash in deadly earnest, pressing every possible advantage, and the bitter fight ends with one warrior in victorious possession and the other in full rout.

the long summer farther north, bringing with them the young which only a little while before were small balls of yellow down and are now strong young birds which will return perhaps with the following spring, taking meticulously the same course from the Gulf of Mexico to the tundras of Canada up the long corridor of Prairie. And here and there in the vast reaches of the Prairie hunters will come into the marshes and the Prairie people and the rich sportsmen from distant cities will have succulent wild duck and goose to eat with the wild rice of the *gourmet* which grows everywhere in the northernmost marshes.

The fat Cockneys of prairie dog town begin to get sleepy and think about the long winter and the greenness goes out of the tall grasses. The coyotes retire from the open Prairie to the edges of the low hills where other life is concentrated and they may find a sparse living during the long winter. Here too are gathered the deer and the antelope with their young fawns; some of them will meet a tragic end from the wolves, the coyotes and the few mountain lions which must live as they can in this fierce, wild country torn in winter by tremendous gales and bitter hurricanes of snow and ice.

Each day the air is colder and each night the violence of the wind from the arctic rises along the whole of the vast Prairie, withering the last remnants of green vegetation until at last there comes the first great blizzard, covering all the area deep in powdery snow which drifts and piles high on the edge



One night the wind blows suddenly chill. In the morning a powdery snow smokes up from the pines on the high plateaus. The cycle of life and death, of mating and bearing, is now complete. All the great and small animals and birds who live on the Prairie prepare, each in his own special way, to weather the cold, barren months to come.



of every clump of trees, in every valley and ravine, and at last the buffalo comes into his own as the true and only Lord and Master of the Prairie of which he is the very symbol.

While other beasts hide in the forest and sleep away the winter in caves or dug-outs or beneath great fallen trees, the

buffalo remains there on the open Prairie which he loves, where he feels he is at home and where nature meant him to live. For him the bitter blizzard, the snow, the ice, the winds which seem to come from the very depths of the Inferno, have no terrors. He turns his enormous head into the storm itself. His thick hide and his woolly coat protect him completely and all around him, in a tight dark mass, gathers the rest of the herd. And sometimes, in his indifference to the storm, the buffalo lies down and sleeps, permitting the blowing snow to pile up around him and even to cover him until he is no longer visible beneath the deep white blanket that extends as far as the eye can reach.

Each year cattle and other animals and even men, with all their ingenuity, die in the fierce blizzards of the Prairie country, but the buffalo alone belongs to the winter Prairie and the lonely winter Prairie belongs to him. When at last the storm begins to lose its howling force, he stirs himself, and the herd, moving with him, creates an earthquake on the surface of the snow-covered Prairie. Out of the white blanket their bodies emerge, the brown fur and hair encrusted with glistening snow and silver ice. Shaking their great heads, the beasts emerge and presently begin to eat haltingly, scraping away the snow with their great hooves

The prairie dogs are driven underground. The coyotes take shelter in the woodlands on the fringe of the plains, where game is more plentiful. The birds pass overhead on their long journey to the south. Only the buffalo winters on the open Prairie. When the blizzard comes, sudden and cruel, only he will endure the biting, snow-laden winds.

to find the grass that lies below. The wind howls across the desert solitude and the dark herd slowly moves across the snow like an endless frieze of animals out of the time when man himself was little more than a brute and the greater part of this same Prairie was buried beneath a great mile-deep mass of ice and snow.

It is true that the buffalo no longer exists in the vast numbers which once roamed this same country. It is true that in a way he has become almost a curiosity, a museum piece, a remnant of prehistoric times. But this, The Vanishing Prairie, is still his country and one knows that, if ever anything happened to man—if man were annihilated by the evil forces of our modern world—the placid buffalo would return to it in vast numbers to overrun the rusting barriers of barbed wire, to find shelter among the ruined cities, to claim the Prairie once more as his very own. It may be that in the end, this great and stupid beast, who has survived hundreds of thousands of years, may survive man himself. And so, as the blizzards sweep down the corridor of the Great Prairie, the story comes to an end in a kind of wintry magnificence worthy of the size and the violence and the peculiar splendor of that vast region which lies between the Rockies and the Mississippi. For those men who live within the borders of the Great Prairie it comes to exert a fascination from which they are rarely able to escape; a fascination associated with a sense of endless space, with skies which seem larger and at night



The howling wind which sweeps from the Arctic down the long, open corridor of the Prairie scourges almost all life from the plains. The buffalo, however, stands stolidly with his head turned into the storm. Even when his shaggy fur is matted with snow and hanging with icicles, it is still adequate to protect him well against the bitterest cold.

more brilliant than anywhere in the world. Over much of the Prairie man^o has put the tractor and the plow; immense fields of wheat, corn and other crops now roll to infinity where, in days gone by, only buffalo grass swept in waves beneath the Prairie wind; farms, villages and teeming cities have spread over the face of the Prairie, claiming for the white man vast spaces formerly roamed by the buffalo and the Indian. Man has done his best, with all the means he can summon, to subdue this country, but great portions of it still remain wild and rich in the solitude which, more and more, becomes one of man's rarest and at times most desirable goals. On the Great Prairie there is still room and space to breathe. If one finds nothing else in the beauties of The Vanishing Prairie, he will find there a kind of wild dignity and a precious sense of space and solitude.

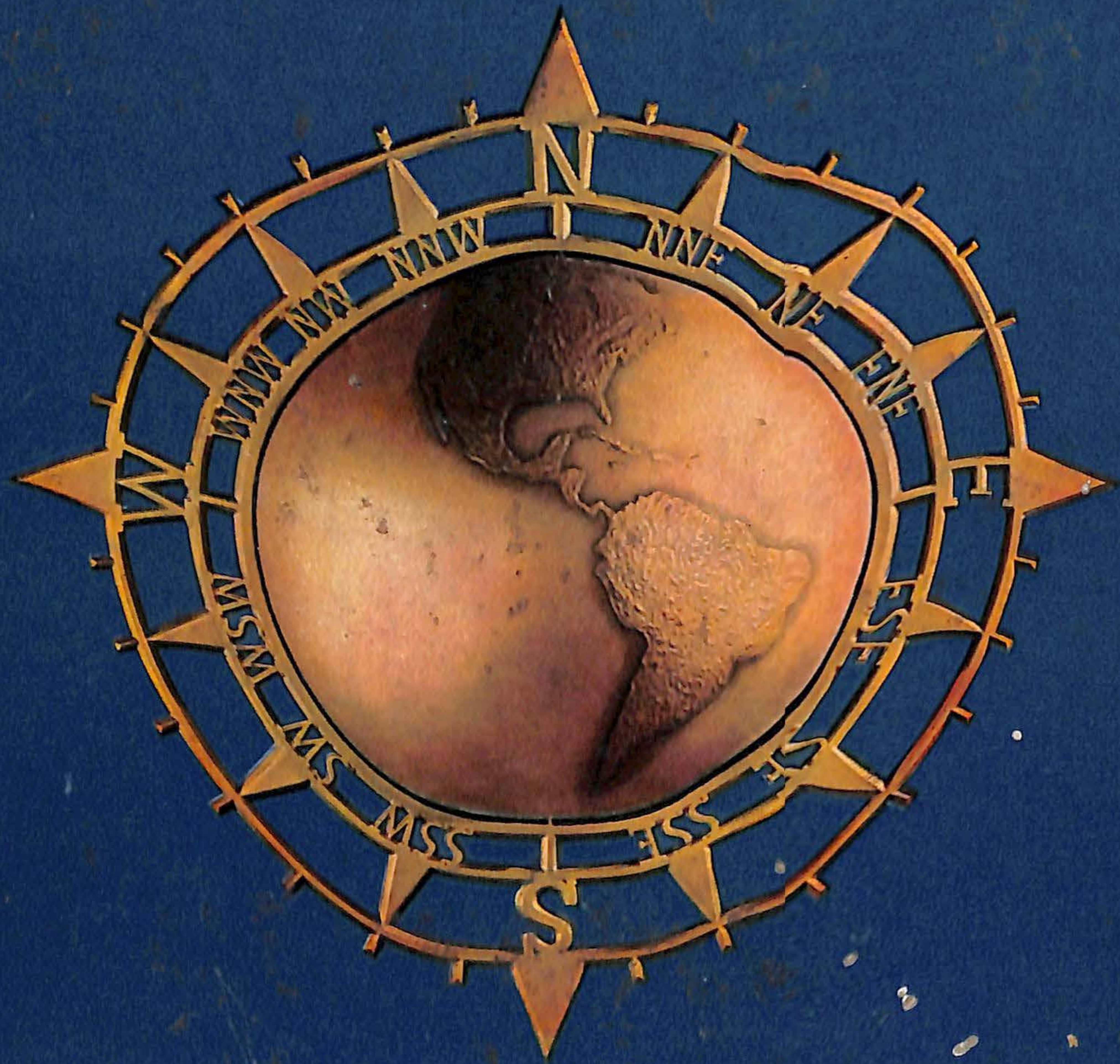


The deer, the cougars and the coyotes have gone. The elk gather their young and depart for a winter haven in the depths of the great northern forests. Snow spreads like a sparkling white blanket, devouring and smothering the restful greens, the shaded reds, the delicate blues of the Prairie. Everything returns to silence and to mystery.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ASPECTS OF THE GREAT PRAIRIE	9
The manifold aspects of the Prairie. Permanent and migratory inhabitants. Arrival of the first migrant birds. Nesting and rearing of the young.	
THE BIRTH OF A BUFFALO CALF	21
Calving of a buffalo cow in a secluded retreat. Making the utmost of the calf's chances to live. The calf's first wobbly steps; a difficult first meal.	
THE HUNT OF THE MOUNTAIN LIONESS	27
The ferocious hunter's silent technique. She kills a doe. Her cubs get a lesson in hunting. The feast. Instinctively, a helpless fawn deceives the killer.	
THE ADVENTURES OF THE PRAIRIE DOG	39
The maze-like dwelling of the Prairie cockney. Antics of ground owls, his comic friends. His deadly foes : hungry coyote, murderous hawk, bloodthirsty ferret.	
THE LIFE AND DESTINY OF THE BUFFALO	57
The buffalo, true symbol of the Prairie, mates in the late summer. Males are then aroused from their passive and even temper and fight for the females.	
THE JOUSTS OF THE MALE MOUNTAIN SHEEP	65
The mountain sheep among forbidding crags. The males' endless and dignified clashes. Their rock-hard horns and foreheads. The Prairie's icy blizzards.	

ZOOLOGIE



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6